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SCIENCE & GOVERNMENT REPORT

The Independent Bulletin of Science Policy

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Inflation Erodes Basic-Science Budget Boost

The financial rescue operation that the Carter Administration says it has mounted in behalf of basic research has just about been obliterated by this year's inflationary surge, and it looks as though the situation next year will be the same, if not worse.

The Administration hasn't said anything about this publicly, nor is there any sign of it going to Congress to seek additional funds for what the President has repeatedly said is an urgent national necessity—the strengthening of basic science, particularly in its major setting, the universities.

But, from a statistical report just issued by the National Science Foundation's Division of Science Resources Studies, it is evident that the presidential budget that Congress is now deliberating for the fiscal year (1980) that starts next October 1 is a losing budget in terms of purchasing power for basic science.

The final returns will, of course, depend on what Congress does with individual agency proposals. But, with the appropriations process now in mid-stream, it doesn't appear that the Congress is in a budget-

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boosting mood; there have already been a few downs—NSF has been snipped a bit, but not badly—and there may be a few ups, especially in health-related research, for which the Administration coyly sent Congress a no-increase budget. The odds, however, are that when the cuts and gains are pooled, the R&D budget will probably total out close to the Administration's original figure.

The NSF report, *Federal R&D Funding by Budget Function: Fiscal Years 1978-80,* is intended as a companion piece to the budget presentation that the President annually sends to Congress. (Copies are available without charge from: Division of Science Resources Studies, National Science Foundation, 1800 G St. Nw., Washington, DC 20550).

Examining federal R&D expenditures on the basis of their relationship to 16 "functional areas" (e.g., defense, health, energy), it found that, even with the 1980 inflationary rate unrealistically pegged at 7 to 8 per cent, the Administration's overall R&D budget "shows growth of 4 per cent, less than enough to meet anticipated inflation." With the 1979 rate of inflation now running near 13 per cent, and nothing on the horizon to produce a downturn, it could well be that R&D is about to go through another round of serious erosion.

Basic research, the segment of R&D that Mr. Carter has repeatedly sought to protect, will fare better than applied and developmental research, but probably only in terms of holding its ground; any "real" increase now seems to be out of the question. The NSF report notes that "The Administration is continuing a policy of assuring real support to basic research," but it simply states that "The basic research total of $4.6 billion in 1980 is, thus, an estimated 9 per cent above the 1979 total of $4.2 billion."

Though the Administration has cultivated the impression that R&D have been singled out for privileged financial treatment in an otherwise tight budget period, the NSF report indicates that this is far from being so. Thus, it states that the 1979-80 increase in R&D funds, amounting to 4 per cent, "is considerably lower than the 10 per cent growth shown for the Federal budget as a whole." Furthermore, as a slice of the total budget, the R&D spending proposed for 1980 stands at 5.5 per

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In Brief

An exodus of top officials from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare is underway. Following FDA Commissioner Donald Kennedy's resignation to return to Stanford, Under Secretary Hale Champion announced he's going back to Harvard. Meanwhile, Patricia Graham, head of the National Institute of Education, says she's leaving, as is Peter Libassi, HEW general counsel.

Reasons for these departures vary, but among them are weariness, irritation with the imperious Califano, and a pending ethics law (likely to be amended, however) which would restrict former government employes in dealings with their old agencies. So far, no replacements for any of the newly announced departees, and it might be hard to fill these posts so late in a tottering administration.

Where's that Commerce Department report on industrial innovation that—following 14 months of work—was due April 1? Latest word is that it's being finished up and will soon be delivered to the White House.

. . . Rising Budgets Fail to Keep Pace

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cent, compared with 5.8 per cent in 1978 and 1979.

The main bright spot for science in the NSF report is in the category of "general science and basic research," which comprises all NSF programs and the Department of Energy's programs in high-energy and nuclear physics and the life sciences and biomedical applications. Taken together, these programs are budgeted for an increase of nearly 11 per cent—which puts them perhaps a step ahead of the inflationary rate. However, when the basic research programs of other agencies are tallied in with those of NSF and DOE, the growth figure drops to 9 per cent.

What this all adds up to, then, is that Mr. Carter's well-intentioned and often-stated desire to make up for the financial losses that basic research suffered through most of the Nixon Administration is largely being washed out by inflation. In fact, the situation is probably worse than NSF's numbers suggest, since the rate of inflation for scientific goods and services tends to be higher than the broadly based national rate.

The question of whether there's any relief in sight has a simple answer: No. Such as they may be, the sufferings of scientific research and its practitioners are not so horrendous that the Administration would make a special trip to Congress in quest of relief. Academic researchers are looking with increasing interest toward links with industry (SGR Vol. IX, No. 9), and it's likely that activity between the two will be growing. But academe and industry have known about each other for a long time without finding any great common ground for collaborative efforts. And, despite Washington's proddings for them to cooperate in research, industry is not stampeding toward investing precious funds in university-based science. The trend is undoubtedly in the direction of more business between the two sectors, but it would be foolish for academic research administrators to harbor hopes of industry stepping in to make up the financial shortfall that inflation is causing in federal financing of basic research.

R&D Hits $57 Billion

Following are some highlights from the National Science Foundations latest annual statistical portrait of research and development in the US:

• Total R&D spending is expected to reach $57.3 billion in 1980, an increase of 9 per cent from 1979, but only 2 per cent in "real ' money (assuming a 7 per cent inflation, which is not a realistic assumption). Since 1975, national R&D spending in real terms is up by

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Budget authority for research and development by function

[Dollars in millions]

	1978 Actual	1979 Estimate	1980 Estimate	Change 1979-80 Dollars	Change 1979-80 Percent
Total	$26,480	$29,451	$30,629	+1,178	+4.0%
National Defense	12,899	14,284	15,117	+ 833	+ 5.8
Space research and technology	3,481	3,944	4,051	+ 107	+ 2.7
Health	2,968	3,387	3,444	+ 57	+ 1.7
Energy	3,134	3,485	3,429	- 57	- 1.6
General science and basic research	1,050	1,128	1,248	+119	+10.6
Natural resources and environment	898	994	1,054	+ 60	+ 6.0
Transportation	767	822	862	+ 41	+ 4.9
Agriculture	501	555	559	+ 4	+ 0.7
Education, training, employment, and social services	344	345	350	+ 5	+ 1.4
Veterans benefits	111	123	123	-	-
International affairs	54	75	100	+ 25	+33.3
Community and regional development	91	113	94	- 19	-16.8
Commerce and housing credit	76	90	87	- 3	- 3.3
Administration of justice	44	46	49	+ 3	+ 6.5
Income security	43	41	44	+ 2	+ 7.3
General Government	18	18	19	+ 1	+11.1

Listed in descending order of 1980 R&D budget authority. One budget function—general science, space, and technology—has been divided into two functions in this analysis: space research and technology, and general science and basic research.

House Hears Candid Talk About the NSF

Newly installed this year as chairman of the House Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology, Rep. George E. Brown Jr. (D-Calif.) opened on May 16 two successive days of hearings that are intended to introduce an "extended inquiry" into the operations of the National Science Foundation. Friendly to NSF, but skeptical and probing, Brown says he wants to know how the Foundation is performing, what its role is in establishing national science policy, in science education, and similar matters. The two days of hearings produced no striking revelations, but since they did extract extended and often highly candid commentaries from some of the statesmen of science, we offer the following extracts from the unedited stenographic transcript; the coming printed version will have been screened by each witness, and will very likely be different in some respects.

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Philip Handler, president, National Academy of Sciences, former chairman, National Science Board:

A substantial fraction of the funds appropriated to the Foundation for the support of research has been so managed as to find its way into as many as possible of the 435 Congressional districts containing more than 1000 colleges and universities . . . Please understand that all grants have been awarded on the basis of peer review. Be assured that the nonsensical, the trivial and the utterly pedestrian have rarely been supported . . . However, although there have undoubtedly been significant exceptions, this activity has contributed relatively little—in a direct way—to the growth of scientific knowledge, as such . . . Accordingly, I could wish that such activities were supported . . . from a

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R&D *(Continued from Page 2)*

nearly 20 per cent, following a decade-long standstill.

• R&D will account for 2.2 per cent of the gross national product in 1979 and 1980, down from the 1964 peak of 3 per cent. NSF says that "Based on R&D funding and GNP projections into the eighties, this ratio should remain at about its present level into the near future."

• The federal role in R&D is declining relative to that of industry. "In 1979 and 1980," NSF reports, "the proportion of R&D spending funded by the federal government is expected to continue to decrease to slightly less than 50 per cent. This is the first time since the collection of statistics began in 1953 that the ratio of federal support will have fallen below 50 per cent. In 1968, for example, the government supported over 60 per cent of the nation's R&D effort."

• The federal government supports about two-thirds of the nation's basic research activities and about one-half of the applied research. Total basic research spending is expected to reach $7.4 billion next year; the figure for applied research is $12.9 billion. Since 1975, industry's "own-funded" basic research has risen by 20 per cent in real terms, following a 10-year period in which such support dropped by 20 per cent.

• Employment of R&D professionals hit a record high of 572,000 in 1977. NSF reports that the full-time-equivalent (FTE) jobs for scientists and engineers have been increasing each year since 1973, when 518,000 were employed. "Based on the expected increases in real-term R&D spending between 1977 and 1980," the report states, "it is anticipated that the employment of FTE R&D scientists and engineers will continue to increase to 625,000 by 1980. All sectors of the economy are expected to share in the increase with the largest absolute growth to occur in industry, particularly in those industries with a heavy reliance on engineering skills.

These data are contained in Publication NSF 79-309, available without charge from: Division of Science Resources Studies, National Science Foundation, 1800 G St. Nw., Washington, DC 20550.

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. . ."Best Engineers Siphoned off to Military"

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program understood to be valued expressly for its contribution to science education . . . because the responsiveness of the Foundation to the egalitarian political pressures that led to the current manner of utilizing its resources . . . has been a genuine handicap to the Foundation as an instrument for supporting the very best of science.

Agencies such as DOD, AEC, NASA, NIH, for example, have been in a position to fund reasonably fully the best of the proposals before them . . . On the other hand, NSF, which is far more constrained to distribute its resources broadly, cannot operate in that manner. Funded less generously . . . NSF has found it necessary to bargain with the most successful applicants for support. . . .

[Regarding West German and Japanese competition in high-technology products], unlike these two principal competitors in the world market, we run a very large military R&D program, and they do not. I submit, sir, that it may be that the principal penalty we pay, maybe, is that the very best of our physical scientists and the very best of our engineers are siphoned off into the military R&D enterprise . . . And while the best of the Japanese and German scientists or engineers are working at the kinds of products that invade our markets, I am afraid that is not the case in our own country.

•

Thomas J. Jones Jr., vice president for research, MIT:

The Foundation should not fund research proposals that do not represent excellent science, even in deprived states. On the other hand, proposals to develop excellent science which permit the proposing institution to significantly strive for good science, and which show good promise, should be funded to generate that. . . The pleasures to spread money around geographically for political reasons other than for development of excellence must be discouraged.

•

Rep. Donald J. Pease (D-Ohio):

. . . In my short experience on this Committee, I have found the Subcommittee members to be quite deferential to each other. If a member proposes an amendment or some Committee language which may bind NSF, the other members of the Subcommittee are likely to be inclined to go along with it. The full Committee rarely challenges decisions made in the Subcommittee, which means, essentially, that one or two members of the Subcommittee can have quite an impact on legislation.

NSF Issues Stimulus Grants

In pursuit of its schizophrenic role as supporter of scientific excellence and egalitarian dispenser of wealth, the National Science Foundation has given seven states grants of $125,000 each to sharpen their abilities to get federal research grants.

The money is the first to be doled out under NSF's newly established Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, which, according to an NSF announcement, "is designed to encourage research competitiveness within the peer review system." The recipients are *ad hoc* committees, composed of local scientists, state officials, and out-of-state specialists, in Arkansas, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia.

Over the next nine months, NSF says, "each committee will evaluate existing scientific resources and formulate criteria for selecting specific individual scientists and developmental procedures to be used for further improving scientific research."

That it's a long road to the pot of gold at the base of the NSF rainbow is suggested by the Foundation's notation that "The committees will prepare proposals which will compete against one another for up to five five-year Implementation Awards."

Courtland D. Perkins, president, National Academy of Engineering:

The engineering community . . . is very, shall we say, nervous . . . that the NSF engineering program does not seem to be playing a major role . . . I think this problem has come to some sort of head. Unfortunately, there are several proposals around that we change the name of the Science Foundation to the National Science and Engineering Foundation . . . There are others . . . pushing for a National Engineering Foundation to be in parallel with the NSF. I might add that Dr. [Robert] Seamans [former NAE president] and I think this would be a bad thing to do. If anyone thinks the National Academy of Engineering is going to head this particular charge, they are wrong . . . I think the NSF continues to have difficulty living with these two worlds [of science and engineering]. They have not really come up with the right answer. I don't think we know what the right answer is, Certainly, I don't believe creating a National Engineering Foundation, even if you could, which I'm sure you couldn't, is an answer.

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NIH Has a New Scheme for Planning Research

The following is from a pamphlet, *Planning for Health Research: Possibilities in the SATT Model,* recently issued by Office of the Director of the National Institutes of Health:

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This document explores one possible model for planning and budgeting HEW health research. The model is called "SATT."

What is meant by "SATT," and how can it help HEW to meet its research planning commitments?

NIH developed the SATT model as a useful way to display its own biomedical and behavioral research activities. "SATT" is an acronym standing for Science Base, Applications, Technology Transfer, and Training. . .

We think the SATT model gives a clearer picture of resource allocation by research purpose than the usual basic/applied/developmental (BAD) breakdown or more fragmented displays by appropriation or by support mechanism. For NIH, and perhaps for all HEW health research, SATT can be used to price the effort directed toward (1) expanding the broad base of knowledge needed for solution of health problems (Science Base); (2) developing proposed solutions to specific problems or verifying them in practical settings (Applications); (3) reaching consensus on feasible solutions and learning and demonstrating how best to apply them (Transfer); and finally (4) continued re-

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Academy Chief's Confession

Congressmen probing the research system are often fascinated with the subject of scientific unorthodoxy and how it fares in the granting process. Are grant administrators encouraged to take risks? Should funds be set aside for long-shot ideas? Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, addressed these questions in testimony May 17 to the House Subcommittee on Science, Research and Technology—and provided the following comments and confession of a long ago event:

I would not like to set aside those funds. I would rather like to instruct the Foundation staff and those peer review bodies what is expected of them. If they are machines for weeding out the highly original, the system is very, very greatly at fault. . .

I forgot what the name of the peer review group was. I was on several . . . but it was one where I stormed out of the room and said if you are not going to support him, I am just quitting because I felt it was just extraordinarily original. So they took my word for it, and it was a couple of hundred thousand dollars of your taxes that went down the drain ultimately . . . I thought it was just marvelously original and the others were, I thought . . . being very starchy. They were right and I was wrong.

NSF *(Continued from Page 4)*

Norman Hackerman, president, Rice University, chairman, National Science Board:

One of the problems is that we have to be structured, because this is money for which people are responsible. And the structure inevitably screens out the far-out ideas. It inevitably does that because you cannot evaluate them. Now, what you can do is to say that we are going to support people who have demonstrated outstanding original minds. That still gets you into some trouble, because you have to identify A versus B with whatever pressures A and B can bring on you. So, if you were to institute a segment that says this is for highly innovative ideas and anybody who has a highly innovative idea, send it in, we will support you—I got to tell you, we are going to get a lot of crank stuff.

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Richard C. Atkinson, director, NSF:

Track records are very important, but I am proud of the fact that we often turn down Nobel Prize winners. One could argue, well, a Nobel Prize is insurance of brilliant performance in the past. Let the man or woman have his way. There is some merit to that argument. On the other hand, there is also some merit in examining the ideas.

You say a five per cent edge on the budget [to support "longshot" proposals]. Let me say, I do not see the need for that. In my judgment, the NSF budget is 100 per cent free to go after the long shots . . .

My judgment about problems in the area of policy research is that too much of it is driven by the immediate concerns of the federal government. That is why it is shipped out to all types of "Beltway Bandit" organizations [a reference to numerous consulting firms situated around the Washington beltway]. I would like to see more substantial, fundamental work done in the policy science area as a backlog for so much of the policy work that is done. I think there, the Foundation, by supporting university research in the policy sciences, would be doing a great deal to insure that the more directly related policy studies were stronger in character.

. . . Emphasis on Investigator-Initiated R&D

(Continued from Page 5)

newal of the supply of talented and dedicated persons essential to the scientific process (Training). SATT is not a perfect model, but we believe it has advantages for planning research at strategic levels, without sacrifice of benefits derived from conventional budgeting. For NIH overall, or for major program areas such as cancer or heart disease, it serves to highlight issues of purpose and approach.

SATT Categories

A cursory inspection of SATT reveals that for the sum of all NIH appropriations, the largest single component is represented by investigator-initiated research within the *Science Base* category. The recent examination of health research principles conducted by HEW reaffirmed the critical importance of maintaining the vigor and attractiveness of this fundamental activity. Indeed, the role of investigator-initiated, or "nontargeted," research is widely accepted as the basic working unit of science, for it is axiomatic that those on the frontier of knowledge best perceive the paths to discovery. Such studies are supported at NIH mainly by the traditional *research project* grant (coded R101). Aggregates of such "units of scientific activity" are supported by *program project* grants (P01). Much of the present strategy for long-range commitments to biomedical and behavioral research has been concerned with ensuring vigorous and predictable support of these project grants (R01s and P01s) in the face of wide-ranging, year-to-year fluctuation of appropriations.

In addition to research grants, the Science Base contains two other important subcategories. One of these is *intramural research.* NIH had its origin in a small research laboratory founded in 1887. Now its laboratories and clinics constitute, with others of the Public Health Service, one of the dominant and most productive forces in the health sciences.

The third subcategory in the Science Base includes the many types of special-purpose *research resources* provided by NIH. Here one finds a collection of innovations designed to enhance, expand, or make more effective the conduct of research. A large component consists of *center* grants, themselves heterogeneous. All provide core support for central research services, common equipment, and administration. Sometimes the center grants directly support research projects, and most contain some discretionary funds to underwrite pilot or feasibility studies. The more comprehensive of the centers are literally "full-SATT" institutions performing all of the major activities, including training. At the least, the centers are meant to promote multidisciplinary achievement not deemed obtainable through project grants. When budgets are austere, center and project grants are competitors for support, and their relative merits for particular programs need thoughtful scrutiny.

Other research resources include the shared facilities funded by NIH's Division of Research Resources. Here are supported beds for clinical research (CRCs), data systems and big instruments shared by many scientists (BRGs), promising young scientists not yet ready for the highly competitive peer review system (BRSGs, BRDGs), and opportunities for minorities to engage in biomedical research (MBSGs). These resources complement rather than compete with project grants. They have long suffered a lack of intrinsic appeal in the appropriation process, and their share of the purchasing power has fallen to dangerously low levels. They should be maintained in some proportion to the sum of all research activity, and need augmentation to support the refurbishing of obsolescent facilities.

Another component of research resources is the fraction of the National Library of Medicine's budget deemed essential to the processing of information. . .

Finally, there is a remainder of research activities, some supported by contract, that are needed to maintain or expand the Science Base (BRSGs, CCRGs, RCPAs, etc.).

Applications, you will note, is a category rather narrowly defined. Only activities unequivocally contributing to the creation or testing of some intervention for prevention, diagnosis, or treatment are included. A large portion of Applications is represented by the NIH Clinical Trials Inventory. The next largest share consists in contracts for procurement or development of well-defined products and highly targeted information.

Transfer at NIH refers to activities considered as "control" or "demonstration" projects, dissemination of information, and consensus development. . . .

Within the outlines of SATT, then, are visible the macroeconomic foci for long-range research planning. The degree of commitment to investigator-initiated research finds expression in the share of funds preserved for project grants in the Science Base. But the allocation turns upon more than a matter of philosophy of how science should be underwritten: the size of the market—measured in available investigators and the number of good ideas that will go unfunded—must be considered. So must the access to research support for new scientists and the turnover of scientists within the system. Available evidence suggests that the "metabolic rate" of creative biomedical research is high—that the present equilibrium conditions include the awarding of one-tenth of the grants each year to new entrants.

Carter Seeks R&D Collaboration on Gas Saving

The President's widely reported aim to bring government, industry and academe into a great collaborative R&D effort aimed at improving automotive fuel efficiency may indeed be realized someday. But, despite the TV and press coverage generated by Mr. Carter's May 18 White House meeting with leaders of the big four auto companies, the proposed R&D effort is both relatively small, several years away from startup, and—perhaps most important—yet to be spelled out in any detail. And, as things so often happen in Washington, it would not be astonishing if the whole thing just quietly disappeared.

Titled the "Basic Research Initiative in Automotive Technology," the program is to be guided by a set of "principles" that are sufficiently vaporous to allow for most anything, but, at the same time, so specific at some points as to invite numerous derailments. The most basic principle, however, concerns "level of effort and timing," which are to be determined, a White House fact sheet states, "by the capacity of the science and engineering community to absorb new funds and the competing demands on federal and corporate resources."

The reality of the matter in presentday American research is that, when it comes to new money, the absorption capacity is enormous; there are lots of talented folks out there just waiting for grants and contracts, according to the federal government's own assessment of what's going on in American R&D. The fact sheet goes on to relate that "industry and government officials will make recommendations on the initial level of effort later this year, in time for the President's consideration as he reviews the FY 1981 budget. The initiative *could possibly* involve government and industrial funding totaling *up to* (SGR's italics) $50 to $100 million after three to five years of build-up."

The White House, with characteristic parsimony, adds that "Industry cost-sharing is an important feature of this effort. Mechanisms will be developed for industry contribution through direct grants to universities, increases in effort at automotive industrial laboratories, and other arrangements."

Another principle calls for "Decentralized project selection mechanisms, within an agreed upon agenda of research areas, and avoiding specified quantitative technological targets, because of the inherent unpredictability of the results of basic research."

Directly linked, in the fact sheet, to Mr. Carter's often-stated support for basic research, the initiative is described as an add-on to the government's present annual spending of $4.2 billion on the basic sciences, of which, we are now told, "about $6 million will be spent in basic research on such projects as developing advanced automobile engines and alternative fuels."

In response to these plans and numbers it might reasonably be asked why is the Department of Energy just now getting started—if indeed it is—on serious R&D work related to automotive fuel efficiency? SGR doesn't have the answer, nor is it possible to get one from the federal bureaucracy. The need for fuel-efficiency research is no more apparent today than it was five or six years ago, nor are the circumstances—scientific, political, or what have you—any more favorable. Every now and then, however, the elephantine federal apparatus manages to stir itself—usually, as in the present situation of a gasoline crunch, in response to a vivid crisis. What's disheartening about this episode is that the processes for decisionmaking in R&D are among the most agile and best managed in the federal government.

The May 18 announcement of the automotive initiative said that government and industry representatives will work together "over the next four months to develop a detailed proposal to submit to the President for his approval."

One proposition they might consider is farming out the whole job to one of the major Japanese automobile firms. With none of this country's huffing and puffing about the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of achieving vastly improved fuel efficiency, Japanese industry is doing it.

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News Notes: Non-Ionizing Radiation, Coal, Etc.

The increasingly controversial issue of the health effects of non-ionizing radiation has spawned the creation of a government task force "to develop a coordinated plan for all government research" on the subject.

Headquartered in the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, the task force was announced by Henry Geller, assistant secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information, and will be headed by Howard E. Clark, of the National Bureau of Standards National Measurement Laboratory.

A Commerce Department press release intriguingly states that "Dr. Frank Press, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, has endorsed the task force and expressed his willingness to seek additional funds for such research if they are needed and used to support a comprehensive government-wide plan."

Writing last month to the heads of 13 federal agencies, Geller said that he wants the task force to "develop a preliminary long-range program plan which includes specific FY 81 budget proposals."

Address of the Non-Ionizing Radiation Task Force: Office of the Chief Scientist, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1800 G St. Nw., Washington, DC 20550; tel. (202) 395-3102.

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A new report, "The Direct Use of Coal: Prospects and Problems of Production and Combustion," has been issued by the Office of Technology Assessment, and has been hailed by OTA Board Chairman Rep. Morris Udall (D-Ariz.) as a valuable basic text for energy policymaking.

The report, 441 pages, is available for $7 per copy from: US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; order by GPO Stock No. 052-003-00664-2.

Life in the goldfish bowl of government is such that no matter what the circumstances, an insensitive remark about physical handicap is impermissible—and must be accounted for with a public apology.

Such has now been offered by Joseph M. Hendrie, the beleaguered chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"I have received a number of communications from persons who were troubled, and justifiably so," he states in an NRC news release, "about a comment I made during the tense moments of Commission discussions of the Three Mile Island accident. In describing our difficult problem of obtaining accurate information, I said, 'It's like a couple of blind men staggering around making decisions.'

"This was an unfortunate reference to blind persons. It was spoken at a time of intense frustration when we were having difficulty in getting clear and adequate information to make reasonable decisions on the situation at Three Mile island. I am sincerely sorry for the statement. I certainly intended no disparagement of anyone with a sight impairment."

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Newly elected to the Council of the National Academy of Engineering: James C. Fletcher, professor of engineering, University of Pittsburgh; George M. Low, president, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and Michael Tenenbaum, retired President, Inland Steel Co. Re-elected to a second three-year term on the 18-member Council was Samuel C. Phillips, Vice President and General Manager, TRW Energy Products Group, Los Angeles. Election is by a mail ballot of NAE members.

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